

ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH EAST ASIAN NATIONS

The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), composed of Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines, was founded in 1967 to promote peace, stability and development in Southeast Asia. Its members have enjoyed strong economic growth of 7% per annum over the past decade, in part because of their considerable natural resources.

Although political co-operation was not one of its original objectives, the formation of ASEAN has enabled its members to develop considerable political cohesion over the past two years, largely in response to events in Indochina. ASEAN has condemned the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea and has called for the withdrawal of foreign troops. Because of its strategic location, its considerable natural resources, and its growing political cohesion, ASEAN has become a vital factor for peace, stability and development in the region. ASEAN has proposed a zone of Peace Freedom and neutrality in Southeast Asia which is the cornerstone to its Foreign Policy.

On international issues, the members of ASEAN are active participants as a group in the UN Conference on Law of the Sea, the Group of 77, the Non-Aligned Movement and various commodity groupings. (ASEAN is a major producer of rubber, hardwoods, minerals, sugar, coffee and vegetable oils.) Although the ASEAN economies are competitive rather complementary, and while progress on economic cooperation has been limited, ASEAN's growing political will strongly suggests that fuller economic cooperation is attainable over the longer term.

The paramount feature of ASEAN is its tradition of consultation and coordination on various issues. The foreign ministers have met annually since 1967, the economic ministers since 1976 and the trade ministers are expected to meet this year. Summit meetings took place in 1976 and 1977 leading to the formalization of institutional arrangement.